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AUTHOR Prucha, Jan
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ABSTRACT

In Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, foreign language tests have been used rarely in schools, because more traditional oral and written examinations are preferred. However, recent changes in socialist pedagogical theory support a trend toward increasing efficiency in the instructional process, increased use of diagnostics, development of more precise measures of pedagogical objectives and practices, and reduced subjectivity in testing. Efforts to increase evaluation objectivity include: (1) changes in the criteria for student evaluation; (2) in Czechoslovakia, implementation of new curriculums in the upper scondary schools; and (3) in the Soviet Union, specialized work on foreign language testing done in research centers. In recent research, foreign language tests have been used to try to explain some components of the foreign language learning- teaching system as defined by socialist pedagogical theory. The studies have included investigations of the characteristics (quantity, quality, and frequency) of vocabulary used in textbooks, and cloze procedure as a means of measuring language proficiency and productive skills. (MSE)

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CURRENT TRENDS IN FL TESTING IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

Jan Prucha (Comenius Institute of Pedagogy, Praha)

In the present paper I will deal with two issues. In the first, more general part I will explain how FL testing has been interpreted in present-day pedagogical and applied linguistic theory in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. In the second part I will describe the main tendencies in the application of FL tests with respect to some important empirical investigations.

1 The general situation

The general situation in FL testing in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union is rather different from the situation in most West European countries. Though FL testing is nowadays recognized as an important means of assessing FL achievements, in school practice FL tests are used quite rarely. In schools of different levels it is mainly traditional methods of evaluation (i.e. oral and written examinations) of FL achievements that are applied.

However, new developments have been taking place in socialist pedagogical theory in the last few years:

(1) There is a growing trend towards increasing the efficiency of the instructional process in school and of its results. Educational theorists in Czechoslovakia and the USSR now emphasize the necessity for pedagogical research to become more efficient.1) Consequently, they also postulate an important role for pedagogical diagnostics. This requires, among other things, the development of more precise and objective methods which could be applied in the evaluation of the real process of instruction and real outcomes of that process. For example, some researchers strongly argue for the reinforcement of the role of exact measurement of pedagogical objectives and processes.2) Thus, socialist pedagogical theory does not reject tests and testing as an instrument of scientific investigation. On the other hand, however, it has a critical attitude towards their abuse or the overestimating of their application: "Tests serve as only one of the measuring procedures in the framework of the whole system of research methods" (Skalkova 1983: 103). Didactic tests (including FL tests) are therefore considered to be, first of all, a means of educational research and not primarily a procedure applied by teachers in the general everyday practice of school instruction.

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(2) In consequence, the most widely used means of evaluation of educational outcomes in school practice are not tests (in the sense of standardized, objective tests) but traditional methods of examination, i.e. oral or written tests. This kind of examination uses marks (a 5-point scale in both Czechoslovakia and the USSR). However, such evaluation of pupils' achievements has been subjected to strong criticism by some pedagogical and psychological researchers in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. The critics present serious empirical evidence concerning mainly the high subjectivity of traditional marking: e.g., one and the same performance of a pupil is marked very differently by a group of teachers or even by the same teacher after some time has passed. Besides the subjectivity, there are other shortcomings for which traditional examinations have also frequently been criticized, such as low economy, poor comparability, a strong dependency of marking on teacher's personal preferences, etc.3)

On the other hand, however, socialist pedagogy has also stressed some important positive features of traditional examinations which are lacking in tests. The following table gives a comparison of examinations and tests.

Table 1

Tests vs. individual evaluation (marking): Comparison of positive and negative features

	individual evaluation (FL)	test (FL)
+	- possibility to approximate to real communicative situations - possibility for teacher to put additional questions, tasks - possibility for teacher to recognize pupil's motivation, endeavour, etc. - not requiring special preparation by teacher - possibility for pupil to be creative - possibility for pupil to be helped (guided) by teacher - during oral evaluation pupil learns to speak in public setting - evaluation is integrated - contributes to developing good social relations between teachers and pupils	- high objectivity of testing - less time-consuming - possibility to compare results - high precision, reliability, good discrimination, etc.

- subjectivity of marking - time-consuming - no fixed criteria for comparison	- artificial activity for pupil - requiring mostly mechanical recall of knowledge - not reflecting pupil's attitudes, opinions, etc.

(3) During the last few years efforts have been made in socialist pedagogy to eliminate the most serious shortcomings of the traditional exam, viz. low objectivity. In the field of FL teaching in the USSR this tendency has been realized mainly through criteria for evaluating pupils' knowledge and skills.4)

An example of the criteria is given in Table 2.

Table 2

Criteria for evaluating pupils' FL achievement
(Soviet system)

Generally, marks are awarded 4 times per school year, with an overall mark at the end of the year in figures: 5 - 1 (5 being the highest mark)

Marks in FL:

a) separate mark for each of 3 FL skills:
   - oral production
   - aural comprehension
   - reading comprehension

   example of criteria for evaluating pupil's oral speech:

   mark 4: if a pupil expresses his thoughts in the FL with only non-significant deviations from the correct usage (e.g. articles in English, or prepositions) but in other respects his performance is in correspondence with goals defined by the syllabus

   mark 3: the same as for mark 4 with more significant deviations from the correct usage (not, however, preventing understanding)

   mark 2: with such deviations which prevent understanding

b) overall mark for FL competency: developed as an integration of 3 practical evaluation

   example: an overall mark of 4 is attained by a pupil if
   - his performance in all 3 partial competencies has been evaluated as 4,

- or his oral competence is 4, but two others are 5,
- or his oral competence is 5, two others are 4 or at least 3

(Source: Normy ocenki znanij, umenij i navykov uceacichsja po inostrannym jazykam (Criteria for evaluation of knowledge, skills and habits of pupils in foreign languages). In: Inostrannyje jazyki v skole, 1978, No. 1, pp. 3-6.)

Of course, the criteria for evaluation have not been intended to replace the use of FL tests (cf. section 2).

(4) In Czechoslovakia one can find another way of increasing the objectivity of traditional evaluation of pupils' FL achievements. Starting in 1984, new curricula have been implemented in our gymnasiums (i.e. upper secondary schools). As regards FL the new syllabuses have been constructed according to the principles of the "threshold level" for learning languages in schools.5) This means that the syllabuses define desirable learning outcomes of FLs (in Czechoslovakia: Russian, English, German, French) in terms of concrete objectives and the respective communicative functions and situations. This specification makes it possible to assess more accurately the extent to which the objectives have been achieved by learners.

For example, the new syllabus for English in grades 1 - 2 of the gymnasium6) specifies 27 basic communicative situations and 35 language functions which the learners should acquire. However, so far no inventory of grammatical and lexical means for the given purposes has been specified (not, that is, in such detail as has been done in van Ek's concretization). It is only stated that gymnasium learners have to achieve active knowledge of some 500 English words per grade, i.e. about 2,000 English words as a whole.

Unfortunately, so far there have not been standardized FL tests corresponding to the new syllabuses. But I have to state here that the conditions for applying such tests are very favourable in Czechoslovakia. We have a centralized system of creating and approving all syllabuses and textbooks. This means that all learners in our gymnasiums learn English or Russian on the basis of the same curricula and textbooks. This makes it possible to apply FL tests to large-scale populations without any disturbing impact of different textbooks as is the case in non-socialist countries. But as pointed out above, until recently FL tests have been used mainly for purposes of research and only rarely as practical instruments of evaluation in schools.

2 FL tests applied for research purposes

In the Soviet Union the theory and application of various FL tests is dealt with in several research centres. The most important among them are

a) Moskovskij gosudarsvennyj pedagogicceskij institut inostrannych jazykov im. M. Toreza (Moscow State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages), i.e. a special university preparing Soviet translators and interpreters.

b) Institute russkogo jazyka im. A.S. Puškina (Puškin's Institute of Russian Language, in Moscow), i.e. the institute serving the purposes of teaching Russian to foreign students and specialists who study in the USSR.

c) The most intensive work in the theory of FL testing has been carried out in Estonia, in the pedagogical and psychological centres of the universities in Tallin and Tartu.7)

Soviet findings in FL testing are published mainly in the journals Inostrannyje jazyki v skole (Foreign Languages in School) and Voprosy psichologii (Problems of Psychology).

In Czechoslovakia there is no special centre for research on FL testing. However, since 1968 a state establishment called Psychodiagnosticke a didakticke testy (Psychodiagnostic and Didactic Test), in Bratislava, has published various tests (among them standardized proficiency tests for Russian at the basic school level). This is an establishment with the monopoly of creating and publishing tests for Czechoslovakia.

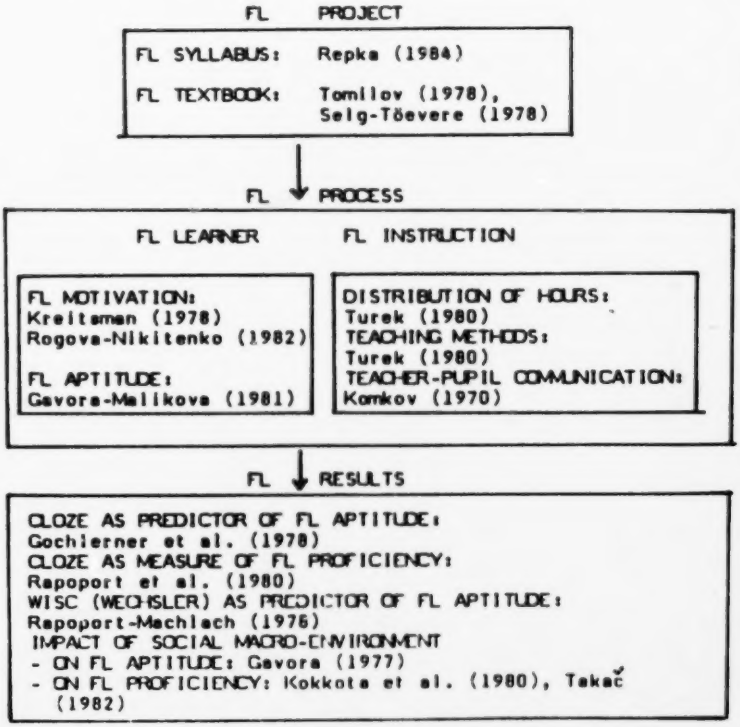
In what follows I try to present a brief survey of investigations in which FL tests have been applied as an instrument of explanation of some components of FL learning-teaching. The process called FL learning-teaching is explained in socialist pedagogy and linguo-didactics as a system. The system consists of its components and is ruled by its determinants. Therefore, my question was simply not how FL tests have been applied in research as such but how FL tests have been used as explanatory tools for some components and determinants of the system called FL learning-teaching.

To give a concrete example: FL tests - as they have usually been applied - measure certain results (achievements, proficiency) of FL teaching. They do not normally assess the causes which account for these results. If a group of learners has, according to the test results, a

given FL proficiency, what are the real causes which produce the assessed state? How have the results been brought about? Is it, for example, due to the distribution of teaching hours for FL in particular grades of school? How do the textbooks contribute to the outcomes, etc.?

On the whole, one has to ask what causes and impacts determine the concrete results of FL teaching at a certain level. For this purpose I have examined how FL tests have been used in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. What I have found is presented in the following figure showing how various levels of FL reaching have been covered by testing.

Fig. 1: Levels of FL teaching: Coverage by tests


FL PROJECT
FL SYLLABUS: Repka (1984)
FL TEXTBOOK: Tomilov (1978), Selg-Tõevere (1978)
FL PROCESS
FL LEARNER
FL INSTRUCTION
FL MOTIVATION: Kreitsman (1978) Rogova-Nikitenko (1982)
FL APTITUDE: Gavora-Malikova (1981)
DISTRIBUTION OF HOURS: Turek (1980)
TEACHING METHODS: Turek (1980)
TEACHER-PUPIL COMMUNICATION: Komkov (1970)
FL RESULTS
CLOZE AS PREDICTOR OF FL APTITUDE: Gochlerner et al. (1978)
CLOZE AS MEASURE OF FL PROFICIENCY: Rapoport et al. (1980)
WISC (WECHSLER) AS PREDICTOR OF FL APTITUDE: Rapoport-Machlach (1976)
IMPACT OF SOCIAL MACRO-ENVIRONMENT
- ON FL APTITUDE: Gavora (1977)
- ON FL PROFICIENCY: Kokkota et al. (1980), Takač (1982)

I shall now present a very brief commentary to some of the most interesting investigations.

(a) The work of the Soviet researcher Tomilov (1978) is an example of an investigation indicating that the results of FL tests are caused by certain qualities of textbooks.

Table 3

Characteristics of the vocabulary in English textbooks in the USSR (grades 5 - 8)

1. Quantity of vocabulary

	Soviet republics			
	Armenia	Estonia	Georgia	Russia
V	1,029	1,153	1,293	974
T	297	420	333	420
Q	3.5	2.7	3.9	2.3

V = number of lexical units (types) of the "active vocabulary" in textbooks
T = number of teaching hours (grades 5 - 8) for English
Q = average lexical loading per 1 hour ($Q = \frac{V}{T}$)

2. Quality of vocabulary

V (total amount of active vocabulary in English textbooks in 8 Soviet republics): 2,580 lexical units

V (lexical units common in all textbooks): 270 lexical units (= 10.5 % of V)

3. Frequency of vocabulary

Only 62 % of V (= 2,580) belong to the 3,000 most frequent words of English (as counted by Thorndike-Lorge).

The author comes to the conclusion (p. 51) that the school leavers of basic schools in 8 Soviet republics have acquired different English vocabulary and can thus mutually communicate in English by using only 270 words common to all of them. Consequently, English proficiency tests cannot be applied for interrepublic comparisons in the Soviet Union.

(b) Another example concerns the matter of what the effect is of the distribution of teaching hours on FL achievements in pupils. In Czechoslovakia, Turek (1980-81) has applied a special proficiency test (in German) to two groups of pupils in secondary economic schools (grade 1):

group (A) which had 3 hours of German per week,
group (B) which had 2 hours of German per week.

Both the groups were taught according to the same curricula and the same textbooks; the only variable was the amount of time devoted to teaching. The hypothesis was that the proficiency of group (A) would be significantly better, especially in skills. A special test was applied assessing pupils' grammatical knowledge, reading comprehension and written production in German.

The main finding was that the hypothesis was not proved: the proficiency of group (A) was not significantly better than of group (B). One can thus conclude that (on the condition that the test concerned is valid and has discriminative power) a test can be used as an instrument indicating how FL proficiency of learners is (or is not) influenced by the number of teaching hours.

(c) A further example concerns the investigation of FL aptitude: In Czechoslovakia, Gavora and Malikova (1981-82) and Gavora (1977) have contributed to solving the question of what are the determinants of FL aptitude in pupils in basic schools. The research of Gavora and Malikova (1981-82) was carried out on a population of 455 pupils in the 4th, 6th and 8th grades of basic schools in Slovakia. Three determinants of FL aptitude were hypothetically expected as the most relevant: age of pupils; sex of pupils; their socio-economic background. A special FL aptitude test was applied consisting of 4 subtests:

- a grammatical subtest, assessing ability to perform perception and discrimination of words in an artificial language,
- a phonetic subtest, assessing ability for aural perception and discrimination of words in an artificial language,
- a lexical subtest, assessing the learners' LT memory for words in their mother language (Slovak),
- a special subtest assessing the ability to learn words of an unknown foreign language. It is perhaps interesting here to mention that Finnish words were used as representing words of an "unknown foreign language" and the task of the pupils was to learn 20 Finnish words (presented with their Slovakian equivalents) and after 8 minutes of learning to recall them (e.g. lapsi - chlapec, oppia = ucitsa, yksi = jeden, etc.).

Briefly, the findings were as follows:

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The ontogenesis of FL aptitude depends significantly on the age level of learners: the higher the age of learners the more developed is their FL aptitude. Thus, the widespread opinion that younger children have better FL aptitude than older children was not confirmed (in conditions, of course, of learning in school, not in natural conditions as, for example, in a bilingual family). As for inter-sexual difference, it was found again that girls have significantly better FL aptitude than boys (in all 3 age groups) though there was no significant difference in IQ level between the sexes. A significant determinant of FL aptitude is the socio-economic background of learners - both the social micro-environment (profession and educational level of parents) and the social macro-level (type of locality the pupils live in).8)

(d) The last example I would like to mention here is based on investigations of Estonian colleagues. As already said, it is in Estonia that perhaps the most intensive work on FL testing has been done as far as the Soviet Union is concerned. There are two reasons for this: Estonian people have a great need to learn foreign languages, particularly Russian (as a language of communication between Soviet nations), German (as traditionally learned by Estonians) and English (in the last few decades). Another reason is that Estonian specialists in psycholinguistics and educational psychology are well acquainted with latest developments in FL testing.

I have found the following main tendencies in Estonian research on FL testing:

Much effort has been devoted to exploring the relations between FL tests and tests measuring "intellectual abilities" in pupils.9) Here mainly WISC tests (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children), especially its verbal sub-tests, have been compared with results of some didactic (proficiency) tests for English and German. For example, Rapoport and Machlach (1978) have found a highly significant correlation between verbal WISC and FL proficiency tests in several independent experiments and, at the same time, a relatively low correlation between WISC and marks awarded to pupils through traditional FL examination as well as evaluations given by expert groups. Consequently, the authors argue that verbal WISC is a reliable predictor of the ability of Estonian pupils to acquire foreign languages taught in schools.

The same endeavour has been devoted to investigating cloze procedure as a tool of language testing. It is interesting that Estonian specialists have come to the same conclusions as Enkvist and Kohonen in Finland:10) Namely, that cloze tests have considerable advantages in comparison not only with traditional exams (marking) but also with multiple choice tests; and, further, that cloze can measure integrative language skills.

For example, Gochlerner, Rapoport and Sotter (1978) found that cloze (applied on texts in the mother language, i.e. Estonian and Ukrainian) reveals a high and significant correlation with proficiency in English (measured by a battery of proficiency tests). The testing was done in groups of learners of grade 10 (i.e. age 17) of Soviet secondary school (cf. Table 4).

Table 4

Correlation of FL proficiency with cloze (ML) and verbal abilities (ML)

cloze (Estonian, Ukrainian texts) /	FL (English) proficiency measured by battery of didactic tests	corr.: 0.795	sign.: p (0.005)
verbal ST memory for / words (listening)	"	0.306	p (0.05)
verbal ST memory for / sentences (listening)	"	0.399	p (0.025)
verbal ST memory for / words (reading)	"	0.362	p (0.025)
verbal ST memory for / sentences (reading)	"	0.335	p (0.05)
verbal ST memory for / texts (reading)	"	0.478	p (0.005)
verbal LT memory for / texts (reading)	"	0.631	p (0.005)

(Source: Gochlerner, Rapoport, Sotter (1978).)

Another type of investigation has been concerned with how cloze can measure productive skills in a foreign language. I shall summarize here an extensive investigation made by Rapoport et al (1980). The investigation aimed at the verification of the following hypothesis: cloze provides a characteristic picture of the real state not only of receptive but also of productive skills in the foreign language in which a text is presented for completion. If this is so, one can conclude that cloze is an integrative measure of foreign language skills.

The verification of the hypothesis was made on a population of more than 2,000 pupils in Estonia and the Ukraine. Altogether 15 kinds of receptive and productive language skills were differentiated. The performance was measured mostly by didactic (i.e., valid and reliable) tests with the exception of some skills evaluated by expert groups. The results in 15 skills showed the following correlations.

Table 5

Cloze as a measure of receptive and productive FL skills

	FL receptive skills:1)	corr.:	sign.:
CLOZE (English)	reading comprehension	0.809	
	aural comprehension	0.843	
(tested with more than 2,000 upper sec. school pupils)	FL productive skills:1)		
	spoken monologue	0.811	
	spoken dialogue	0.852	p (0.005)
	written dictation	0.680	
	written essay	0.836	
	integrated evaluation of FL proficiency2)	0.861	
CLOZE (German) (1,063 pupils of grade 7)	FL speech production:1)		
	dialogue	0.87	p (0.005)
	essay	0.93	

1) measured by valid and reliable didactic tests - e.g. characteristics of dialogue: number of syntactic patterns, variability of syntactic patterns, vocabulary richness (type/token ratio), number of replies to a partner, number of verbal stimulations to a partner

2) measured by expert evaluation

(Source: Rapoport et al. (1980).)

The method of verification has also been applied to the rate of deletion of words from the text (every 6th, 5th, 4th word or key words, i.e. those of the highest information value). It was found that cloze is most valid if every 6th word is deleted. Taken as a whole, the authors came to the following conclusions (Rapoport et al., 1980, pp. 113-116):

Cloze is an integrative test, i.e. it reliably reflects both receptive and productive language skills. Thus, cloze can be applied instead of a battery of special tests measuring particular kinds of FL proficiency. Cloze tests are suitable for mass application in schools, i.e. in large populations of testees as well as with smaller groups and individuals. The construction of cloze tests has to fulfil certain criteria: the texts have to reveal a logical coherence; every 6th word has to be deleted and altogether at least 50 words should be deleted; the scoring has to be done so that all contextually and grammatically correct words are accepted.11)

Thus, Estonian colleagues express their strong conviction that cloze procedure has advantages as a test of language skills in comparison with other tests. On the other hand they admit that cloze is not the only method which should be applied in FL testing - which is, again, in correspondence with the suggestions made by Enkvist and Kohonen (1978).

Notes

1 See, for example, the book by a leading Soviet pedagogue, Babanskij, Ju.K., 1982.

2 See especially Byčkovsky, P., 1982, and Skalkova, 1983.

3 Čajagi, L., 1978.

4 Normy ocenki znanij, umenij i navykov ucascichsja po inostrannym jazykam (Criteria for evaluating pupils' knowledge, skills and habits in foreign languages). Inostrannyje jazyki v skole, 1978, No. 1, p. 3-6.

5 Cf. van Ek, 1976.

6 Anglicky jazyk - Učebni osnovy pro I. a II. ročnik gymnazia (English - Syllabus for grades 1 - 2 of gymnasium). Praha, SPN 1983.

7 See, for example, a special collection of papers Teorija i praktika jazykovych testov (Theory and application of language tests), ed. by R. Selg and I. Sotter (published by Research Institute of Pedagogy, Tallin, 1980). The book has been supplied with an English - German - Estonian - Russian dictionary of terms on language testing, pp. 203-229.

8 The FL aptitude of children living in the capital of Slovakia (Bratislava) and in towns was better than of those living in small (non-urban) communities. - Similar dependencies have been found in other investigations into psycholinguistic abilities and skills in

children, both in Czechoslovakia and in the USSR and other East European countries. This implies that the type of locality is probably a strongly relevant variable influencing the psycholinguistic profile of children living in a socialist society. I have discussed this problem in more detail (in relation to the validity of Bernstein's theory in socialist countries) in my review (of T. Erasmie's book "Language development and social influence") published in the International Journal of Psycholinguistics, 1978, No. 12, pp. 62-66.

9 The term "verbal intelligence" is not used in the terminology of Soviet researchers. Instead, the Russian term "umstvennyje sposobnosti" (i.e. intellectual abilities) is applied.

10 Enkvist, N.E. - Kohonen, V.

11 Much attention has been devoted to cloze scoring, in confrontation with the work of Bormuth and others, by J.A. Mikk, with respect, however, to measuring the difficulty of textbooks - see Mikk, J.A.: Optimizacija složnosti učebnogo teksta (Optimization of the complexity of textbooks). Moskva, Prosveščenije 1981.

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